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Bulgaria

Food and Agricultural Import Regulations and Standards

New Veterinary Export Certificate Requirement 2000

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Report Highlights:
The Bulgarian Vet Service will require a new format of export certificates from all importers of livestock, animal products and feedstuffs effective January 1, 2001. The new regulation is likely to impact the meat market causing a reduction in meat imported from large meat exporters such as, Argentina and Australia. Some EU meat exporters to Bulgaria may benefit from the regulation since new certificates are based on EU models. A new U.S./Bulgarian language certificate is being developed and a phase-in period is being adopted to avoid stopping any ongoing trade.

The New Regulation

On December 15, 2000, the Bulgarian Vet Service introduced new requirements for export certificates accompanying all shipments of livestock, animal products and feed items imported to Bulgaria. The new export certificates will be required by importers from January 1, 2001. In July 2000, the Bulgarian Minister of Agriculture issued an Ordinance#RD 09-733/July 5, 2000 which was afterwards published in the Official Gazette #86/2000. The Ordinance called for a new requirement that export certificates to have text in Bulgarian language along with the language of the country of origin.

The veterinary service tried to introduce this requirement a year ago but with no success due to the reluctance of foreign governments and private trade to adopt a special export certificate for such a relatively small market. However, due to the difficult epizootic situation in the region and in Europe in CY2000 (i.e. identification of FMD cases in neighboring countries and BSE in Western Europe recently), the veterinary service has decided to fully enforce the new requirement in 2001.

The argument for requiring a Bulgarian language text is that local customs officers and veterinary border control agents can not always read and understand foreign languages. This creates the possibility of easier smuggling and thus illegal meat imports.

Bulgarian authorities have agreed to allow a phase-in period for use of the new certificates. The U.S. will be permitted to export until a further notification is given. At present, Bulgarian authorities are finalizing an English-Bulgarian language certificate based on the FSIS 9060 format (wholesomeness certificate). No shipments on the water will be stopped and the official notice for use of the new English-Bulgarian language certificate is expected in early January '01.

The new certificates are similar to those used in the EU and were agreed to with the EU authorities. It is not very clear how exactly the Bulgarian veterinary service will implement this foreign language requirement. In the past, authorities allowed Bulgarian translation done by importers so that the country of export authorities were not required to change their certificate format. The new regulation, however, assumes that the Bulgarian language should be included in the export certificate upon its issuance.

Effect on the Local Meat Market

The veterinary service is aware that large export countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia and Argentina are very unlikely to change their standard format of export certificates. Since Australia and Argentina are the usual meat exporters to Bulgaria, the new regulation may lead to an eventual decline in meat imports. This will further complicate the local meat market situation which currently faces meat shortages and price increases. At the same time, it may well serve the EU meat exporters since the new certificates are based on the EU models.

A copy of the new certificate format is available from the USDA/FAS office in Sofia, Bulgaria.